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Ceremonies at the Unveiling of
Monument to

WILLIAM H. HERNDON

Abraham Lincoln's last law partner

Oak Ridge Cemetery
May 30, 1918
Springfield, Illinois

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ADDRESS BY
HARDIN W. MASTERS, Esq.
of the Springfield, Illinois Bar

Privately Printed

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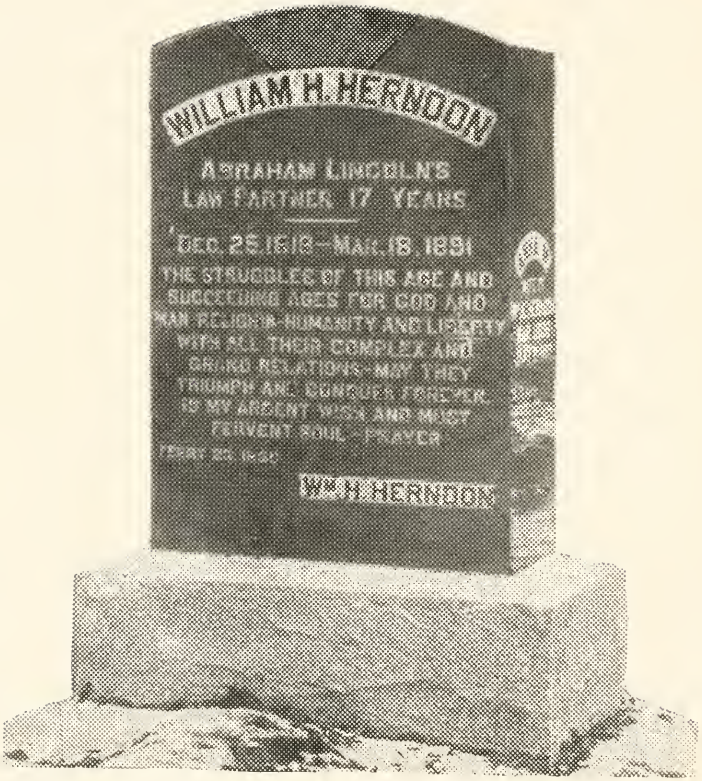
ILLUSTRATIONS

William H. Herndon, 1858 Frontispiece
Photograph of Monument
Fac-Simile Autographs; Lincoln—Herndon


WILLIAM H. HERNDON
ABRAHAM LINCOLN'S
LAW PARTNER 17 YEARS
DEC. 25. 1818—MAR. 18. 1891
THE STRUGGLES OF THIS AGE AND
SUCCEEDING AGES FOR GOD AND
MAN RELIGION-HUMANITY AND LIBERTY
WITH ALL THEIR COMPLEX AND
GRAND RELATIONS-MAY THEY
TRIUMPH AND CONQUER FOREVER.
IS MY ARDENT WISH AND MOST
FERVENT SOUL-PRAYER
FEBRY 25. 1850
WM H. HERNDON

ANNOUNCEMENT

By Nellie Browne Duff

A handsome monument has been erected in Oak Ridge Cemetery in this city to mark the grave of William H. Herndon, law partner of Abraham Lincoln for seventeen years. The grave has been unmarked since the death of Mr. Herndon in 1891.

The monument was purchased with a fund raised by special subscription and contributed to by persons in all parts of the United States. The committee which secured the fund was composed of Henry B. Rankin of this city, who studied in the office of Lincoln and Herndon, and who is the author of works on the life of Lincoln, H. E. Barker, also of Springfield, a collector of pictures and published works dealing with the life of Lincoln, and Jesse W. Weik, a collaborator with Herndon in his *Life of Lincoln*, of Greencastle, Indiana.

It was felt that the fact of Mr. Herndon's grave being unmarked was a matter of national importance, and the committee experienced no difficulty in securing subscriptions. The amount raised came

from forty-two people, living in Boston, New York, Texas, St. Louis, Chicago, Pennsylvania, Connecticut, and even in Balboa, a city in the Panama Canal Zone.

The people who sent money for the monument fund expressed admiration and sympathy for the Herndon who was Lincoln's law partner in the '50s, and were interested in the fact that his grave was at last to be suitably marked.

Mr. Rankin wrote an article in 1912 calling attention to the fact that Herndon's grave was unmarked, as well as several other places about the city of Springfield which had become noted because of association with Lincoln. This article was read by Mr. Weik, who later asked Mr. Rankin and Mr. Barker to co-operate with him in an effort to place a monument at Mr. Herndon's grave.

The monument is of gray granite, the base being of the unpolished stone, and the upper part of what is known as "Dark Quincy" granite, the finest quality of granite coming from Massachusetts quarries. The base is two feet wide and four feet long, and the entire height of the monument is five and one-half feet.

The inscription is simple, as is the monument itself, bearing the words, "Abraham Lincoln's Law Partner Seventeen Years," the date of Mr. Herndon's birth, December 25, 1818, and of his death, March 18, 1891. The inscription further contains words which have an even greater meaning now than at the time they were written. Mr. Rankin, then a young man studying law in the office of Lincoln and Herndon, brought an autograph album to the office one day, asking Mr. Lincoln to write the first words in it, and turning to Mr. Herndon for the next autograph. This album is still in the possession of Mr. Rankin, and the words written by Mr. Herndon are inscribed on the monument. They were written on February 23, 1858, as follows:

> "*The struggles of this age and succeeding ages for God and man—religion, humanity and liberty, with all their complex and grand relations—may they triumph and conquer forever, is my ardent wish and most fervent soul-prayer.*"

Mr. Herndon practiced law with Mr. Lincoln seventeen years. When Lincoln was made president and went to Washington, it was his wish that the sign of the law firm of which he was a member

remain unchanged. As Henry B. Rankin has expressed it, "the partnership was dissolved by the bullet of Wilkes Booth."

Through his long association with Lincoln, and his intimate knowledge of his life, character and habits, Mr. Herndon wrote a *Life of Abraham Lincoln,* which is considered by some to be the best and most authoritative story of Lincoln's life and history ever written.

Mr. Herndon was twice married. The graves of the two wives are on either side of his, and the monument which marks his grave bears an inscription for each of them.

ABRAHAM LINCOLN WALKS AT MIDNIGHT IN SPRINGFIELD, ILLINOIS

(Recited by the author, Vachel Lindsay)

It is portentous, and a thing of state
That here at midnight, in our little town
A mourning figure walks, and will not rest,
Near the old court house pacing up and down.
Or by his homestead, or in shadowed yards
He lingers where his children used to play,
Or through the market, on the well-worn stones,
He stalks until the dawn-stars burn away.
A bronzed, lank man! His suit of ancient black,
A famous high top hat, and plain worn shawl
Make him the quaint great figure that men love,—
The prairie lawyer, master of us all.
He cannot sleep upon his hill-side now.
He is among us, as in times before.
And we who toss, and lie awake for long,
Breathe deep, and start, to see him pass the door.
His head is bowed. He thinks on men and kings.
Yea, when the sick world cries, how can he sleep?
Too many peasants fight, they know not why.
Too many homesteads in black terror weep.

The sins of all the war-lords burn his heart.
He sees the dreadnaughts scouring every main.
He carries on his shawl-wrapped shoulders now
The bitterness, the folly and the pain.
He cannot rest until a spirit-dawn
Has come: the shining hope of Europe free:
The league of sober folk, the workers' earth,
Bringing long peace to cornland, alp and sea.
It breaks his heart that kings must murder still,
That all his hours of travail here for men
Seem yet in vain. And who will bring white peace
That he may sleep upon his hill again?

SIXTY YEARS AGO

. . . Coming into the office with this book in my hand, it attracted Lincoln's attention. Taking it from me, and finding the pages blank, he asked what it was to be used for. I explained that I meant to procure from time to time autographs of friends, and I had brought it with me then to get his signature for the first page of the book. . . . He placed it open at the first page, on the table before him, took his pen and wrote:

> Today, Feb. 23, 1858, the owner honored me with the privilege of writing the first name in this book.
>
> A. Lincoln.

I placed the book next before Mr. Herndon, and requested him to write on the same page. He read Lincoln's lines, paused, as if considering what he would write, then took his pen and rapidly wrote:

> The struggles of this age and succeeding ages for God and man—Religion—Humanity and Liberty—with all their complex and grand relations—may they triumph and conquer forever, is my ardent wish and most fervent soul-prayer.
>
> Wm. H. Herndon.
>
> Feb. 23, 1858.

Pp. 132-134, "Personal Recollections of Abraham Lincoln, the First American," by Henry B. Rankin, pp. 428. (Putnam's Sons, New York, 1916.)

To day, Feb. 23 1858, the owner honored me with the privilege of writing the first name in this book— A. Lincoln—

The Struggles of this age and succeeding ages for God & Man — Religion — Humanity & Liberty with all their Complex and grand relations — may they triumph and Conquer forever, is my ardent wish and most fervent soul-prayer.

Wm H. Herndon

Feby 23d 1858

INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

By Adolph Bernard
President of the Sangamon County Bar Association

Introducing Mr. Masters, Adolph Bernard said:

"Ladies and Gentlemen—The Committee having in charge the arrangements for these exercises are to be congratulated that, in addition to that which has preceded, we are now to hear the address dedicatory of this monument. The speaker is a well known lawyer of our city, a life-time citizen of Illinois, and was well acquainted with Mr. Herndon in his later years. He is recognized as a forceful and eloquent speaker wherever known, and you will not leave this spot with any disappointment on his account. I take great pleasure in presenting to you as the orator of the day, Hardin W. Masters, Esq., of Springfield, who will now address you.

ADDRESS

Mr. Masters said:

Mr. Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen and Friends:

It is fitting that upon the occasion of the decoration of the graves of our fallen heroes and friends which has become a sacred custom throughout the land, that we should also decorate the graves of the civilian heroes as well as those who may have fallen in battle, for "Peace hath its victory no less renowned than those in war."

We come to dedicate the marker placed at the grave of our friend in life, William H. Herndon. It may be thought a tardy recognition of the merits of the dead, but it is none the less sincere. The memory of the active, impulsive, energetic man in life, who now sleeps beneath this stone, is more bright and his character as a man better understood than at the time of his death. A bright intellect and a worthy citizen passes away,—in the mad rush of life we pause, look into the open grave, perhaps shed the sympathetic tear, and immediately join in life's

battle, and except for recollections which may be momentary, his life and character and the memory thereof gradually fades away. Men die but principles forever survive. Those whose memories live throughout the ages and withstand the ravages of time are those who have accomplished something in this life. Men whose memories expand and grow brighter as the years pass, are those regarded as having been given to the world to act a part, perform a service for humanity, govern a nation, command an army or deliver a message. In a sense this is true. But even so when the individual life is analyzed, it will be found that a Napoleon, Washington, a Shakespeare, Grant or Lincoln, through his ability, energy and labor worked out his own destiny.

William H. Herndon in his brief day accomplished much. When he wrote the sentiment carved on this marker in the album of Henry B. Rankin, his law student, he was weighted down mentally with the struggles that were then on in this nation. It was a struggle for humanity, liberty, democracy and for God. The tragedy in which Lovejoy lost his life wrought a change in the mental attitude of Mr. Herndon and his soul was inspired with the thought to banish forever the evil which had fastened itself

upon this nation. His impetuous, zealous and impulsive nature was aroused to right the wrongs and evil of slavery. From the day when, as a student at Illinois College, with forceful and eloquent denunciation of Lovejoy's murder, until the day of the end of slavery, he never ceased his assaults against any and all, who sought to obstruct the way that led to ultimate success. The great service rendered by him in the struggles of that day, interwoven as they were with the immortal Lincoln, places his memory upon an historic plane and it will grow brighter through all the ages to come.

He was the intimate friend and adviser of the martyred president for more than a score of years. In a professional, social and political way, they were in full sympathy and accord. Mr. Herndon loved Lincoln and rejoiced in his every success politically and otherwise, and he lived to place upon the memory of Lincoln a literary wreath that will never be excelled. It was a tribute of his devotion to Lincoln as a man and as president, and as he doubtless thought, was a faithful biography of the life of Mr. Lincoln.

Herndon had in the fullest measure the courage of his convictions, and he paved the way to Lincoln's success with fearless voice and pen and materially

assisted in the accomplishment of the desired result. Great men in those days, unable to break away from established policies and a legalized wrong, sought to belittle Lincoln's terse statement that "this nation could not endure half slave and half free," but that ultimately it would become all one thing or all the other.

This statement was justified by subsequent history and his name stands forth in freedom's beautiful robes and form, and today blesses the people of all these United States.

Today the world is engaged in a titanic struggle to determine the question whether this world can endure part autocracy and part democracy. It is the last, as we fervently hope, of the struggles of humanity for freedom and liberty and may we not conclude that with prophetic vision when these words, inscribed upon this tomb, were written by Mr. Herndon, that he foresaw the struggle which was ultimately to come and which is now upon us. The struggles of the day of which he wrote was not the first, but up to that time was one of the most important struggles for liberty.

Did he see in prophetic vision the millions of men arrayed against each other upon the field of battle,

the one side seeking to perpetuate autocracy and the propaganda that might makes right, and on the other that all men are created free and that the divine right of kings to rule must and shall be wiped from the face of the earth? The sentiment in the inscription on this tablet as the soulful prayer of William H. Herndon, was answered in 1865, and the prayer therein expressed and by him extended to us of this day will be answered in this bloody conflict as it was then. This struggle will continue until the world becomes a democracy and the common people will be kings with the right of freedom and self-government.

A lawyer of ability, William H. Herndon gave his life and best energy to the cause of humanity. He was equipped by nature with a splendid intellect and a zealous, honest, soulful nature, and he threw his life and force with voice and pen into the cause he espoused.

Wrongfully he has been accused with being an office seeker and that his life was embittered. Nothing could be further from the real truth. He was not an office seeker, nor was he an office holder, and beyond some local office, he never held or sought for position or public office. He was appointed bank examiner by the war governor, Richard Yates,

and when Lincoln, after his election to the Presidency, asked him if he wished for any position, he replied: "No; you may speak to Governor Yates; I would like to be re-appointed bank examiner."

Lincoln was a conservative, Herndon was a radical. They were agreed as to the ultimate purpose, but differed as to the methods to attain that purpose. Mr. Herndon was some years the junior of Mr. Lincoln. He was a great student and omniverous reader, and was a great aid to Mr. Lincoln, being possessed of extensive book knowledge. From the day he entered into partnership with Lincoln in the practice of law, until such partnership was dissolved by death, he was his faithful friend. He was one of the earliest and perhaps the foremost who urged Lincoln to become a candidate for the presidency. He had carefully canvassed the ground in the State of Illinois with Mr. Lincoln's friends on that subject. He was chosen and commissioned to canvass the situation throughout the Eastern States and well, as history informs us, did he perform this service. His commission was to create a sentiment for Lincoln.

During the debates held between Lincoln and Douglas in the year 1858, to a degree Lincoln de-

pended upon his partner, Mr. Herndon, to furnish him with data and facts and often during this memorable campaign he telegraphed or wrote Herndon for such information. As it appears to us now, he was the forerunner for Abraham Lincoln and his mission was to pave the way to his election,—not only of his election to the presidency, but for the ultimate success of his theory and belief, in freedom for all the people of these United States.

Wm. H. Herndon had few equals as a public speaker, and if not the first he was among the first to speak in favor of the abolition of slavery which was made in this State. He took a bold stand against slavery and the first address was delivered by him at Petersburg, Illinois,—yet remembered by some of the older citizens. This was a classic and one of the greatest orations Herndon ever made from the stump. It was an historic oration, and in his peroration he appealed to Donati's comet, asking it to inform its heavenly sisters of what was about to take place in the United States for God and humanity.

Mr. Herndon was not only not an office seeker, but he cared but little for the goods of this world, and true to the old saying as a lawyer he "worked hard,

lived well and died poor.'' Of his time and labor he gave without stint to the great cause he had espoused. No man who ever lived or died had greater love or admiration for Lincoln than did William H. Herndon, and when the news flashed over the wire in this country in 1860, announcing Lincoln's election, his was a boyish joy. In the daily intercourse in the dingy law office between these two great men, a friendship and admiration for each other had been established that time could not change nor modify.

Temperamentally and in almost all other respects, they were as unlike as two men might be. Lincoln in a sense was an uneducated man, while Herndon had a liberal education. Historical facts were at his command and philosophy and literature were not unknown to him, and in the fullness of his mental storehouse he was able to and did render valuable service, as it was his pleasure to do, to his partner, his friend and afterward the martyred president.

In the decline of his life it was my good fortune and honor to have intimately known Mr. Herndon. As I entered upon the way and the struggles that were before me, I frequently and freely met and talked with him. It was with profound interest I heard from his lips of the past, the road over which he had

then traveled and the struggles he had had to contend with. His life as I knew it was an honest, earnest struggle for the right as he saw it. He had no ambition to acquire riches or fame. His life was devoted to succor the oppressed and to eradicate and blot out the stain of slavery in this nation. It was his ambition to make the Declaration of Independence everywhere a living truth. While he was a lawyer, he disliked the technicalities of practice and frequently made jocular remarks about the difference between "tweedle-de and tweedle-dum."

Knowing him as I did, if he could be heard from the spirit world to speak and express his wish here today beyond that expressed on his tomb, it would be his wish that no unjust claims should be made for him, and that no eulogy be pronounced upon his life which was not supported by the record and sustained by the proofs. He would also in his honest, blunt way command that no excuse be offered for his faults nor that his failings be exaggerated.

Such was the character of William H. Herndon. He loved the truth. His early life, so far as I know, was much the same as that of other young men similarly situated.

He came of splendid ancestry, who were from the South, and in their sentiments were pro-slavery, but when the Whig party was dissolved in 1854, he allied himself with the Whigs and Democrats, who took the view of slavery that it was a moral wrong and ought to be done away with. It may be true that in his youthful zeal the murder of Lovejoy, heretofore referred to, changed the whole course of his life, because from that day he espoused the cause for which Lovejoy died, and the force of his logic and versatility of his pen were used to light the fires of liberty throughout the land, and he was fortunate to know that what he had labored for had been accomplished.

He did his work with which the world may be concerned within comparatively a few years,—from 1854 to 1870 embraces the time in which he wrought. During that period and until the period of 1861, he was the active business partner of Lincoln.

As I said a while ago, Lincoln was a conservative, having his origin in the South, he hated slavery, but recognized that under the organic law of the land, the slave was the property of the southern people, and if it were necessary to prove that Lincoln was a conservative, in the emancipation proclamation

which was issued by him, the abolishment of slavery was contingent upon the States then in rebellion returning to the Union, and that they would lay down their arms, otherwise the emancipation proclamation at a certain time would take effect. The States in rebellion refused to accept this condition and slavery was therefore abolished. This result was hailed by Herndon as an epoch in history and an answer to his soulful prayer for liberty, and so it is that his life is connected with that of Lincoln.

Being as he was, a firm friend and admirer of Lincoln and long before he was nationally known he from the mountain tops and the sublime points of vantage, looked down upon the plain where the sentiment was created which was to materialize and bear the fruit which in God's good time would weld together the nations of the world and all mankind in one common brotherhood.

Those who scoffed at Lincoln and carricatured him and ridiculed him as an incompetent did not know or understand him. Herndon knew Lincoln better than Seward, Greeley or Chase, or any other of the legal advisers in or out of his cabinet. He was confident and so expressed himself in his correspondence with Theodore Parker and others when he said,

"Wait and see," and in waiting he was justified when the world became aware of the fact that Lincoln was greater than the whole of those who traduced him and sought to be his advisers or to belittle him.

Herndon therefore not only supported and aided Lincoln in his proper ambition before, but after he became the head of the nation and commander of the greatest army of the world up to that time.

My friends, Herndon's love for Lincoln did not cease upon his death, but he was his champion afterward.

Herndon may have made mistakes in some of his writings. He was human and made mistakes in other matters. If I should say he did not, I would offend against the truth and place him in character above the human and above the man for whom he did so much. The history of each of these men is written. It may be that it is not as well understood now as it will be a hundred years from now. The relation between Herndon and Lincoln will become better understood as time goes on. If it be granted that Mr. Herndon made a mistake in his biography of Mr. Lincoln, it was a mistake of the head and not of the heart, and in no sense does it detract from the

glory or grandeur of Mr. Lincoln's character, and if there is a word or statement that can be found in any of William H. Herndon's writings with reference to Lincoln, which is not strictly in accordance with the truth, knowing Herndon as I did, I with confidence assert that when he wrote the same he believed it to be true.

Yes, Mr. Herndon had his faults as all men have, but a multitude of faults in his case could be overlooked when we say and challenge the world to dispute it, that he was scrupulously honest and a man of truth and integrity. It is no great deed or act to revile the living at least in their absence; it is easy and requires little courage to make charges against the dead, as no word comes back from the grave in reply, and as the memory of the martyred Lincoln shall grow brighter and his colossal figure stand forth adorning the pages of history for all time to come, so shall be known the virtues of his co-agitator and friend, who sleeps beneath this stone.

"In the struggles of this age and the ages to come, for God, humanity and liberty, may they conquer forever is my soulful prayer." Who but a soul and mind devoted and dedicated to the cause of humanity and to God and to the principles of liberty and

the cause of righteousness, on the moment, could have penned these words, so pregnant with patriotic sentiment, so earnest, and impressive? No friend nor adversary ever could or did charge William H. Herndon with duplicity or insincerity. He was loyal to his friends and an open, courageous adversary. He was zealous, but abounded in charity. In the epoch and history-making period in which he lived, he stood forth as the champion of and advocated the principles announced by the sentiment on this stone.

In the re-birth of civilization now taking place in which the world is being drenched with human blood and the issues of force and might are arrayed against right and democracy, in this struggle may we not know, had William H. Herndon lived today, where he would have stood? Yes, with incisive, terse language, with keen logic, by voice and pen, he would be heard in the cause of liberty, for the cause of democracy, for the people and for God,—in this great struggle which he seems to have foreshadowed, when he wrote those words, would some day arise.

Dead! His wish, his recorded, soulful prayer is with us today,—the wish and soulful prayer of the American nation and the civilized world, that autoc-

racy and might shall be crushed by democracy and right; and this soulful prayer of Herndon's is also that America and her heroic allies whose blood and treasures are being poured out in the cause of humanity shall not have been in vain.

Thus, in life, Lincoln and Herndon, allies and friends, partners in the practice of law, differing radically, yet firmly held together, and in accord as to ultimate truth and facts,—in death their memory so blended as to be inseparable.

Live on, oh Lincoln! Live on, oh Herndon! and ages to come may your lights be reflected and your labors for humanity be the more prized and appreciated. And may your example be forever the inspiration of the youth of the land and the star of their hope, and as time goes on be better understood.

So today with feeble words and simple ceremonies, but with loyal hearts and loving hands, we decorate with flowers the grave of our friend, a civilian hero, and dedicate this stone as pointing the spot where forever will repose the ashes of Illinois' illustrious son, whose prayer, a continuing wish for liberty, God and humanity, is with us, and an inspiration to all those who this day, on the blood-drenched battle

fields of France are bravely challenging the advancing hosts of autocracy and might.

"The struggles of this age and succeeding ages for God and man—religion, humanity and liberty, with all their complex and grand relations—may their triumph and conquer forever, is my ardent wish and most fervent soul-prayer."

In the ages to come, when this stone, through the ravages of time shall have crumbled to dust and decay, may this sentiment now chiseled thereon be the creed and the realized hope of all the world, and the memory of its author, William H. Herndon, live on to bless and cheer mankind until struggles shall be no more!

WILLIAM H. HERNDON

There by the window in the old house
Perched on the bluff, overlooking miles of valley,
My days of labor closed, sitting out life's decline,
Day by day did I look in my memory,
As one who gazes in an enchantress' crystal globe,
And I saw the figures of the past,

As if in a pageant glassed by a shining dream,
Move through the incredible sphere of time.
And I saw a man arise from the soil like a fabled
giant
And throw himself over a deathless destiny,
Master of great armies, head of the republic,
Bringing together into a dithyramb of recreative
song
The epic hopes of a people;
At the same time Vulcan of sovereign fires,
Where imperishable shields and swords were beaten
out
From spirits tempered in heaven.
Look in the crystal! See how he hastens on
To the place where his path comes up to the path
Of a child of Plutarch and Shakespeare.
O Lincoln, actor indeed, playing well your part,
And Booth, who strode in a mimic play within the
play,
Often and often I saw you,
As the cawing crows winged their way to the wood
Over my house-top at solemn sunsets,
There by my window,
Alone.

From *Spoon River Anthology* by

EDGAR LEE MASTERS

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BOOKBINDING
Grantsville, Pa.
March - April 1989
Work Quality Bound